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ABSTRACT

This benchmarking tool is designed to help higher education institutions (HEIs) assess the contribution they are making to their region. It aims to encourage debate on a voluntary basis within and between individual HEIs, and to assess the contributions they are making to the economic and social development of their region and how those contributions might be developed. The three functions of the tool are: (1) assess improvements in the strategy, performance, and outcomes of HEI regional engagement; (2) help the HEI set its strategic priorities; and (3) support joint strategies within a regional partnership. The tool is not to be used by the Higher Education Funding Council for England as a basis for allocating resources. There are several elements in this tool. The first is analysis of existing quantitative indicators and the development of new quantitative measures of core, regionally oriented activities. The next step is benchmarking questions on aspects of institutional management and culture related to promoting regional engagement, and the final element consists of questions on the main themes of regional economic and social development. For each of these, good practice in support of regional processes is the benchmark to be attained. When HEIs do use this tool, it is up to them to decide how to follow up on the results and whether to make them available publicly. (SLD)

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Evaluating the regional contribution of an HEI

A benchmarking approach

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Evaluating the regional contribution of an HEI

A benchmarking approach

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Evaluating the regional contribution of an HEI

A benchmarking approach

To	Heads of HEFCE-funded higher education institutions Heads of HEFCE-funded further education colleges Heads of universities in Northern Ireland
Of interest to those responsible for	Strategic planning, Regional development, Links with business and the community
Reference	02/**23**
Publication date	April 2002
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Executive summary

Purpose

1. This benchmarking tool is designed to help higher education institutions (HEIs) assess the contribution they are making to their region. It aims to encourage debate on a voluntary basis within and between individual HEIs, to assess the contributions they are making to the economic and social development of their region, and how those contributions might be developed.

Key points

2. The tool has three functions:

- to assess improvements in the strategy, performance and outcomes of HEI regional engagement
- to help the HEI set its strategic priorities
- to support joint strategies within a regional partnership.

3. We do not propose to require individual HEIs or HEI regional associations to use the tool in any particular way. It will not be used as a basis for allocating resources. Where HEIs do decide to use the tool, it will be for each to decide how to follow up the results and whether to make them publicly available.

4. Comments on the tool, and feedback from HEIs on their experience of using it, would be welcomed. These should be sent to David Charles at the Centre for Urban and Regional Development Studies (CURDS) at the address on page 1.

Background

5. This benchmarking tool has been developed as part of a project funded by the HEFCE, with the support of Universities UK, to identify and communicate the regional contributions made by HEIs in England. The project focused on the existing activities of HEIs in their regions, and examples of good practice. Results have been published in a series of reports covering each of the English regions, with a national overview report ('The Regional Mission', available from Universities UK).

6. This document goes one step further, offering institutions that wish to engage with their regions a way of assessing the contribution they are making, by reference to the likely needs of the region. It is up to institutions whether and how they use the tool. We do not intend to use any results to produce rankings of HEIs, or to allocate resources, as institutions will vary in their natural capacity to meet different benchmarks. But we believe that the benchmarking process will help HEIs to identify priorities and work towards good practice.

Objective

7. The objective is to give individual HEIs a means of assessing their regional impact. The key challenge is to highlight not just linear relations between an HEI and its region, but also a wide range of strategic interactions. Strategic priorities for regional engagement should be regional development processes which link between, for example, economic development and educational attainment, or community regeneration and the formation of new firms.

8. The tool assesses whether or not, across a broad range of processes, an HEI contributes significantly to regional development. It does not assess how well managed it is, nor its success in educational or research terms. Not every HEI will want to contribute in all possible ways identified. All HEIs will have a combination of strengths and areas of lower contribution. The latter may be strategic choices rather than weaknesses. What is important is that HEIs seeking to contribute to particular regional development processes should aim to achieve good practice.

9. The tool is also designed to work with a regional assessment tool for identifying regional problems and priorities.[1] It can therefore support the development of a collective strategy by the HEI and a range of regional partners.

10. The tool therefore has three functions:

- to assess improvements in the strategy, performance and outcomes of HEI-regional engagement
- to help the HEI set its own strategic priorities
- to support joint strategies within a regional partnership.

Why use a benchmarking approach?

11. Benchmarking is a well established element in the process of continuous improvement for commercial companies, and has recently been applied in other areas, such as public services.

12. Several aspects of benchmarking are valuable:

a. A range of benchmarks can cover the variety of actions undertaken by a heterogeneous set of HEIs. Any HEI can identify at least some areas in which it can be successful, rather than being assessed against a few externally selected criteria.

b. Benchmarking can support decision-making on where HEIs should devote more effort to support their regions more effectively. This can be usefully connected with a parallel exercise at regional level to determine regional priorities.

c. Benchmarking approaches have been developed which use qualitative as well as quantitative indicators, process measures, and leading and lagging indicators. They can therefore help to identify if good practices are being adopted without waiting to measure outputs.

[1] This tool was developed by CURDS in a different context. For further information contact David Charles at CURDS.

d. Benchmarking allows the combination of different forms of measurement, and models of performance.

Quantitative and qualitative measures

13. In assessing how an HEI interacts with its region there are typically two main approaches: quantitative indicators of performance (such as how many firms have been assisted, or jobs created, or the number of visitors to an art gallery); and qualitative assessments (such as how well the HEI undertakes processes such as graduate placement, or participation in regional economic development partnerships).

14. There are several problems with quantitative indicators:

a. They reflect past actions and policies rather than current strategies.

b. They are highly influenced by the structure of HEIs and inputs such as the quality of students.

c. They are often crude surrogates for what needs to be measured, and there is a risk of seeking to deliver the required indicators rather than the desired outcomes.

d. It is easier to measure absolute outputs than value added.

e. There may be significant time-lags in ultimate success.

f. Significant economic impacts may require risk-taking, and hence there is a likelihood of short-term failure and poor performance even if the approach is correct.

15. Despite these difficulties, there is considerable investment in the development of performance indicators, which are valuable for assessing whether additional investment in a particular activity affects the scale of impact of that activity.

16. Qualitative assessments also have shortcomings:

a. Good practices may depend on the context, so the relative success of one approach may be difficult to judge.

b. Most qualitative evaluation is akin to description, and generalisation is difficult.

17. Both quantitative and qualitative assessments suffer from a problem of scale. At what scale should measurement take place, and what measurements can be applied across a wide range of departments and activities? Many activities are undertaken by parts of the HEI only, or are small elements within the work of a department, and hence tend to be unmeasured or unreported to the centre of the HEI. The efforts of individuals may be significant but go unnoticed within their departments.

18. These problems are not of course particular to HEIs. The approach used here builds upon existing benchmarking by, for example, the European Foundation for Quality Management, but applies the concepts to this new field.

Structure and use of the benchmarking tool

19. The benchmarking tool has several elements:

a. Analysis of existing quantitative indicators, and the development of new quantitative measures of core, regionally-oriented activities.

b. Benchmarking questions on aspects of institutional management and culture related to promoting regional engagement.

c. Questions on the main themes of regional economic and social development. For each of these, good practice in the support of regional processes is the benchmark to be attained.

20. As presented here, it is for use at an institutional level, but certain aspects may be applied to sub-units such as campuses or faculties. It is designed to be implemented within cross-functional and cross-departmental groups in an HEI, and to involve staff at all levels and students.

21. A five-point scale represents the spectrum from poor to good practice, which can be used to produce scores for groups of indicators. Institutions can use these results, with the quantitative data, to identify areas in which they are performing well. This can be extended to internal analysis of which departments or units are achieving good practice.

22. More importantly, the process of benchmarking can stimulate discussion and internal assessment of where to focus effort, for the benefit of both the region and the HEI. Such discussions could consider:

a. What are the mechanisms within the HEI to establish a consensus on strategic priorities for regional development.

b. What mechanisms can be established within the HEI to link existing regionally-focused activities and add value to them.

c. What mechanisms exist within the HEI to balance its different geographical roles and create synergy between them.

d. What mechanisms exist within the region to consider issues such as health, culture, the economy, and community regeneration, in a joined-up way.

e. What mechanisms can be established to bring together those involved in the regional development process such as HEIs, Regional Development Agencies, community groups and central government, so they can prioritise which regional needs should be addressed.

Practice and performance indicators

23. The benchmarking tool uses two types of indicators, practice and performance, for each aspect of the HEI's engagement.

a. **Practice indicators** relate to the ways in which the HEI seeks to interact with the region. The aim is to assess if the HEI is 'doing the right things', putting good processes in place that will lead to beneficial regional outcomes.

b. **Performance indicators** assess the consequences of past actions. They show whether the HEI 'did things right' in the past and therefore has achieved strong outputs. They could also be evidence of a regional environment in which it is easy to get the outputs even without the right processes.

24. An organisation that currently performs well and achieves good outcomes but has not put good practices in place will be vulnerable to declining performance in future. Its current success may be as a result of high levels of resources in the past, or a strong regional environment. Conversely, an HEI with good practices may not achieve good performance if it is operating in difficult circumstances.

25. HEIs can use their indicator scores to examine how engagement is spread across the range of regional development activities, and where the balance is between current performance and those practices needed to ensure improvement in future.

26. HEIs vary greatly in mission, size, subject offer, and research intensity. That necessarily impacts on the scope for, and nature of, their regional engagement. The benchmarks which follow need interpreting in the light of each HEI's particular circumstances.

Using quantitative data

27. Quantitative data can be used in a raw state to compare with sector averages, adjusted according to various criteria, and used to show over- and under-performance. This is the case with some existing HEFCE performance indicators relating to socio-economic status of students.

28. Another approach is to develop five-point scales which can measure achievement of target levels of performance or degrees of improvement. So, for example, the scale might differentiate the raw number of spin-off firms established; the number of firms divided by a measure of size or research performance; the number as a proportion of sector averages (less than average, 50 per cent more than average); or a level of improvement (same as last year, 50 per cent more than last year).

Using qualitative data

29. Qualitative data needs to be translated into a numerical score for analysis. This can be done by developing a scale from poor to good practice in performance (for example, no testing of user satisfaction, irregular testing of user satisfaction, regular testing of user satisfaction). The indicator will only be useful if it actually differentiates, so the full scale should be used to guarantee maximum sensitivity.

Putting benchmarking into practice

30. It is up to HEIs to decide how to use the tool. But to get best results, the benchmarking should be undertaken through a five-stage process which aims to ensure that:

- different interests in the HEI are involved
- the evaluation of practice is removed from existing interests in strategies, policies and projects
- there is ownership and consensus on the view of regional practice
- the results of the benchmarking are given back to the people who need to act upon them.

31. The five stages are as follows:

a. **Initiation.** A team is established to implement the benchmarking approach, briefed on the objectives, provided with copies of the benchmarking tool included in this document, and informed on how to complete it.

b. **Preparation.** Each team member examines a copy of the benchmarking tool, and makes an initial assessment.

c. **Workshop.** An event is held in which all the questions are discussed, and a single common set of answers agreed.

d. **Report.** The responses are analysed and results are returned to the participating team members and other regional partners.

e. **Dissemination.** The results of the report are discussed by the team and perhaps with other regional partners to decide how the findings will be used and disseminated.

32. If the HEI wants to examine a more limited sub-set of benchmarks, perhaps focused on a specific theme, then a one-off meeting could be organised to address that theme, involving relevant HEI staff and partners from outside the institution.

Initiation

33. The co-ordinator of the benchmarking process receives a copy of this benchmarking document, and is responsible for assembling the team, distributing materials, arranging meetings and encouraging responses. The benchmarking team should represent the following groups:

- senior management (for example, a pro vice-chancellor, senior administrative staff)
- staff responsible for links with business and the community (regional office, careers service, innovation support)
- faculty and departmental management
- research and teaching staff.

34. Additionally the HEI might want to include representatives of students, and of key local partners such as an HE liaison officer from a Regional Development Agency or local authority.

Preparation

35. Each member of the team should spend some time reading through the questionnaire and the accompanying guidelines in this document. They should then score the HEI for each question on a scale from 1 to 5 as indicated. Questions should be left unanswered if the respondent has no real knowledge of that specific issue, or cannot justify their response. Certain statistical data will need to be collated and the co-ordinator should take responsibility for gathering this from relevant officers.

Workshop

36. For a number of the questions there will probably be a variety of responses. In the workshop each question should be examined and debated by the group in order to reach a consensus.

37. At this stage, an important learning process is to examine why there might be different perceptions of the HEI's rating on a specific issue. Also a detailed understanding can emerge of where major problems lie.

Report

38. The purpose of the benchmarking exercise is for the group members to articulate their views on the current position of the HEI, and for this to be combined with a variety of base-line indicators. This allows a combined analysis of the performance and practice of the HEI. The analysis takes place after the workshop, and can be returned as a written report or as a series of bar charts or web diagrams produced using a standard spreadsheet package.

Dissemination

39. Following the return of the reports on the HEI, the co-ordinator can explore the issues raised by the analysis and discuss with the group which are the priority issues for action. The group may then decide on wider dissemination, sharing the results with a wider group of individuals and bodies within the HEI as part of a strategy development process.

Framework for assessing regional needs

40. Regional competitiveness can be defined as the ability of the members of a region to ensure that businesses based within it are achieving higher levels of value-added, measured against international competition, sustained by the assets and institutions of the region – thereby contributing to rising GDP, a broad distribution of wealth across the population, a high standard of living, and increases in learning and knowledge.

41. The benchmarking tool presented here builds upon work by CURDS to develop indicators to assess the competitiveness of a region. This uses a combination of outcome statistics, and more qualitative assessments of inputs and developmental potentials.

42. Seven main groups of processes underpin regional competitiveness:

a. **Enhancing regional framework conditions** – supporting the regional infrastructure, regulatory frameworks and underlying quality of environment and lifestyles. This includes the HEI helping the region to identify where improvements can be made, or providing direct input to the quality of the local environment.

b. **Human capital development processes** – supporting the development of human capital through education and training both within the HEI and in other organisations. The emphasis here is on how the HEI adds to the stock of human capital by facilitating the development of people in the region, and retains both local and non-local graduates. (The education of people from outside the region who then leave it does not add to the stock of human capital in the region, and therefore is not relevant for this process. However it may be important at national level, and it does add to regional GDP.)

c. **Business development processes** – the creation and attraction of new firms, as well as support for developing new products, processes and markets for existing firms.

d. **Interactive learning and social capital development processes** – encouraging co-operation between firms and other institutions to generate technological, commercial and social benefits. Regional collaboration and learning between organisations are important in regional success. HEIs can promote the application of knowledge through regional partnerships, and encourage networking and the building of trust.

e. **Redistributive processes** – ensuring that the benefits of enhanced business competitiveness are widely shared within the community, and that the health and welfare of the population are maximised.

f. **Cultural development** – the creation, enhancement and reproduction of regional cultures, underpinning the other processes above, and interpreting culture both as activities that enrich the quality of life and as patterns of social conventions, norms and values that constitute regional identities.

g. **Promoting sustainability** – long-term regional development must be underpinned by processes seeking to improve sustainability, even though some of these objectives may appear to conflict with business development objectives.

43. The activities of HEIs which contribute to these seven processes can be identified and mapped to assess their contribution to regional competitiveness. These contributions could be either active or passive, and could also be unintended or in opposition to an institution's own objectives. The issue is not the assessment of an institution's strategy or measurement of what makes for a successful HEI, but the extent to which the HEI's actions are beneficial to the region. However, if the institution seeks to contribute to the success of its region, the analysis of the regional shortcomings in these processes will indicate priorities for engagement.

44. Hence the benchmark measures that follow are grouped according to the regional development processes rather than internal characteristics of the HEI, and measures and outcomes need to be examined for relevance to the underlying competitiveness mission.

The benchmarking tool

1 Enhancing regional framework conditions

Benchmark 1.1 Engagement in regional infrastructure planning and assessment
Benchmark 1.2 Investment in a high quality campus
Benchmark 1.3 Using HEI demand as lever to upgrade infrastructure

2 Human capital development processes

Benchmark 2.1 Access for students from disadvantaged groups
Benchmark 2.2 Retention of graduates in the region
Benchmark 2.3 Involvement in regional skills strategies
Benchmark 2.4 Responsiveness to regional labour market demands
Benchmark 2.5 Involvement of employers in developing the curriculum
Benchmark 2.6 Course provision for employers and employees

3 Business development processes

Benchmark 3.1 Strategic plan for business support
Benchmark 3.2 Creation of spin-off firms
Benchmark 3.3 Engagement in inward investment
Benchmark 3.4 Promoting graduate entrepreneurship
Benchmark 3.5 Graduate start-ups arising from HEI programmes
Benchmark 3.6 Availability of entrepreneurship modules
Benchmark 3.7 Student placements with local employers
Benchmark 3.8 Incentives for staff to engage with business

4 Interactive learning and social capital development processes

Benchmark 4.1 Involvement in regional governance
Benchmark 4.2 Contribution to regional economic analysis
Benchmark 4.3 Analysis of regional futures
Benchmark 4.4 Staff exchanges

5 Redistributive processes

Benchmark 5.1 Contributing to healthy cities and health promotion
Benchmark 5.2 Support for community-based regeneration
Benchmark 5.3 Student community action

6 Cultural development

Benchmark 6.1 Cultural strategy
Benchmark 6.2 Provision of cultural facilities
Benchmark 6.3 Impact on local tourism
Benchmark 6.4 Levels of participation by the community
Benchmark 6.5 Fostering regional cultural identities
Benchmark 6.6 HEI spin-offs to the cultural sector

7 Promoting sustainability

Benchmark 7.1 Sustainability at the heart of HEI governance
Benchmark 7.2 Promoting sustainability through the curriculum
Benchmark 7.3 Performance against environmental management systems

1 Enhancing regional framework conditions

Underlying regional performance is a set of core framework conditions – the national and regional legal and regulatory framework, infrastructure, the natural resource base, climate and the quality of life. These conditions cannot be modified easily, if at all, although investments in infrastructure can affect some aspects. HEIs have little direct impact on such framework conditions but can make a contribution.

Benchmark 1.1

Engagement in regional infrastructure planning and assessment

Benchmark 1.2

Investment in a high quality campus

Benchmark 1.3

Using HEI demand as lever to upgrade infrastructure

Benchmark 1.1

Engagement in regional infrastructure planning and assessment

Type

Practice.

Rationale

Regional competitiveness is in part dependent on adequate infrastructure. HE does not have a direct involvement in the provision of infrastructure (with the exception of its own facilities), but can assist regions in identifying infrastructure needs and providing evidence for benefits. The benchmark asks whether the institution has capacity to provide such advice, and if such advice is offered.

Sources of data

Internal assessment by reference to research strengths and impact on local infrastructure policy.

Good practice

Regional infrastructure investments come in a variety of forms, such as transport, energy, information and communication technologies, and business parks. Most HEIs will have some activities that relate to such investments, whether it is a business school looking at demand aspects or a civil engineering department. Departments or units may undertake research into regional infrastructure needs, either under contract to regional bodies and firms, or as part of supervised student projects. At an institutional level, HEIs should be aware of the work that is being undertaken. They should also ensure both that regional partners are aware of the capacity and competences available in institutions, and that results are effectively disseminated within the region as an input to RDA strategies.

Levels

1	2	3	4	5
No engagement in regional infrastructure planning or assessment, despite the existence of relevant skills and knowledge.		Departmental level activity to identify regional infrastructure needs on an ad hoc basis through local contracts etc. But no institutional recognition of this expertise or link with regional strategy.		Departmental level expertise and knowledge is recognised centrally and built into strategic discussions with regional partners.

Benchmark 1.2

Investment in a high quality campus

Type

Practice.

Rationale

The main infrastructure provision made by an HEI is through its own buildings and estate. Although mainly directed to meet its own needs, the estate nonetheless provides some facilities of more general value to the regional community and can help create a positive image for a region.

Sources of data

Self-assessment with input from regional partners.

Good practice

Good practice will depend on whether the institution is urban based or an out-of-town 'campus' university. For an urban university the built form should make a positive contribution to a high quality urban infrastructure, possibly enhancing urban regeneration through new developments, and with associated streetscape works to unify the campus. For campus universities the buildings and setting should be of high quality and high visibility, with a strong positive image for the region and a focus for business development through associated science or business parks.

Levels

1	2	3	4	5
Anonymous campus or fragmented building stock. No positive images associated with the campus, poor quality architecture. Low regional identification of the university.		Quality of the built environment of the university is acceptable but not outstanding. Individual buildings contribute to the quality of the environment, but some may also be viewed negatively. A campus university may be set in good quality parkland, but with relatively poor quality buildings.		University campus or buildings provide a strong identity, used by regional bodies as a strong positive image. Buildings contribute to the quality of life in the area by enhancing the city centre or as a park for local people. Environment is attractive to business and developers.

Benchmark 1.3

Using HEI demand as lever to upgrade infrastructure

Type

Practice.

Rationale

As a large organisation, an HEI places significant demands on local infrastructure for daily commuting flows, long distance transport routes, communications and the wider urban environment. HEI managers should be assessing infrastructure demand for the institution as a whole and engaging in negotiations with RDAs, local authorities and providers of utilities to ensure that their needs are considered alongside other private sector employers. By adding the HEI's needs to those of others, a better case may be made for changes and investments that benefit the community as a whole.

Sources of data

Internal assessment.

Good practice

HEIs should assess their infrastructure needs and collaborate with other organisations in the region to build a case for new infrastructure developments. An example would be to undertake an audit of air travel by university staff, in conjunction with regional partners, to argue for new routes or an upgrading of facilities.

Levels

1	2	3	4	5
No consideration of infrastructure needs outside the immediate campus.		Ad hoc response to local planning proposals for infrastructure and lobbying where immediate problems are faced. Responses are often left to individual departments rather than made by the institution centrally.		External infrastructure requirements considered as a central element of estates strategy, and HEI draws on internal expertise to inform lobbying for additional provision. HEI seeks to collaborate with other local organisations in communicating demand for new infrastructure.

2 Human capital development processes

HEIs are core contributors to the stock of human capital in the UK through their education and training functions, encompassing both the mainstream teaching programmes and short and vocational training courses. From the perspective of the region the key question is whether the HEI contributes to the enhancement of human capital within that region. These benchmarks focus on the practices and outcomes that lead to a better skilled and educated workforce in the HEI's region.

Benchmark 2.1
Access for students from disadvantaged groups

Benchmark 2.2
Retention of graduates in the region

Benchmark 2.3
Involvement in regional skills strategies

Benchmark 2.4
Responsiveness to regional labour market demands

Benchmark 2.5
Involvement of employers in developing the curriculum

Benchmark 2.6
Course provision for employers and employees

Benchmark 2.1
Access for students from disadvantaged groups

Type
Performance.

Rationale
Raising both educational attainment and the proportion of the workforce with high level skills is important in creating a knowledge-based economy. Students who study in their home region are most likely to remain there after graduation, so extending participation within a region is a key element in strengthening the regional labour force. This indicator assesses whether the HEI has been successful in attracting students into HE from disadvantaged communities within their region.

Encouraging access for disadvantaged students from any location is equally valid, but the specific focus here is how the HEI benefits disadvantaged groups in its own region. This measure relates to good practice from the perspective of the region and may not coincide with what is best for the financial performance of the institution as a whole.

Sources of data
Postcode analysis of students living within the region.

Good practice
Good practice will vary by institution, but benchmark figures for the proportion of students from disadvantaged groups have been published by the HEFCE ('Performance indicators for higher education institutions', HEFCE 01/69). The indicator needs to be recalibrated for regional students only. It is likely to be higher than for the total student population, as students who study in their home region tend to be less affluent than those that study elsewhere.

Levels

1	2	3	4	5
Percentage of disadvantaged students among students from the home region is significantly lower than benchmark figure for institution.		Percentage of disadvantaged students among students from the home region is equal to benchmark figure for institution.		Percentage of disadvantaged students among students from the home region is significantly higher than benchmark figure for institution.

Benchmark 2.2
Retention of graduates in the region

Type
Performance.

Rationale
Retention of graduates within the region is a key output target for HE in seeking to contribute to the local labour market. Retention levels are affected by a number of factors, including where the students come from and the local labour market, both of which are outside the control of the HEI. Hence this indicator should be judged alongside other benchmarks on promoting links with local employers.

Again this indicator views outputs from the region's perspective. The region will want to increase levels of graduate employment, and an HEI that is successful in placing graduates within its region will contribute more to realising this objective. However, some institutions may have very different objectives, and the students themselves may prefer to leave the region to find work.

Sources of data
First Destination Survey and HEI student records.

Good practice
Good practice should be judged for two specific groups: those originating in the region and finding employment in the region, and those originating elsewhere and finding employment in the region. In each case the indicator selected is the proportion of graduates in employment after six months where the place of employment is within the same region as the HEI, expressed as a percentage of employed graduates.

Levels

1	2	3	4	5
Retention levels of both local and non-local groups are significantly less than the national average for each group.		Retention levels of both local and non-local groups are close to the national average for each group.		Retention levels of both local and non-local groups are significantly higher than the national average for each group.

Benchmark 2.3
Involvement in regional skills strategies

Type
Practice.

Rationale
RDAs and Learning and Skills Councils will engage with a variety of regional partners in developing regional skills strategies. HEIs aiming to contribute to this process should seek to be actively involved in strategy development to ensure that skills strategies benefit from HE participation and that HE activity can take full account of regional strategic frameworks.

Sources of data
Internal assessment and cross-check with regional partners.

Good practice
HEIs should seek to ensure that HE is fully engaged with regional skills strategies, and that the expertise and data available within HE are fully utilised within regional strategies.

Senior HE staff should take a leadership role in regional partnerships, and be involved in steering committees, rather than simply being represented on working groups.

Levels

1	2	3	4	5
Passive response to skills strategies. No involvement in steering committees, no provision of data or expertise. No attempt to influence or respond to strategy during consultation.		Active engagement providing expertise and data, interpretation and leadership inputs.		HEI seen as a core asset in the region and becomes a central element within the strategy.

Benchmark 2.4

Responsiveness to regional labour market demands

Type

Practice.

Rationale

Regional labour market demands shift from year to year as a result of two processes: changes in the nature of skills needs within particular occupations or industries over time, and changes in the sector mix within regions. Accepting that part of HE's role is to provide for these needs through undergraduate and more specialised short courses, the HEI's ability to adapt and respond to regional needs is a key indicator.

Sources of data

Internal assessment, evidence of existence of key processes.

Good practice

HEIs can monitor the skills needs and sector changes of their regional economies though labour market intelligence (LMI), and should be investing either individually or collectively in interpreting these data. LMI expertise should inform the discussion of aggregate provision and bespoke course targets across the institution.

For individual courses the HEI should make use of LMI and actively involve local employers in developing and regularly reviewing the content of the curriculum.

Levels

1	2	3	4	5
No monitoring of skills, no general use of LMI, and no collaboration with employers.		Moderate responsiveness – some changes in provision based on forecasting of demand using LMI, but little ongoing dialogue with employers and other bodies. LMI would typically be examined in central service units but not disseminated and used in departments.		Sophisticated monitoring systems at HEI level, with provision of appropriate data to individual departments. Evidence that information from LMI and employer suggestions are acted upon at central and departmental levels.

Benchmark 2.5

Involvement of employers in developing the curriculum

Type

Practice.

Rationale

If employers contribute to the design of courses, graduates should be in a better position to contribute to the local economy.

For some courses such links will be obvious and direct. Many graduates are seeking to work within the locality, and employers can help shape curricula to meet their needs and to be in touch with industry developments.

This indicator will be more problematic where courses are non-vocational, and where the local economy is less oriented to graduate employment. However, even in these cases there are advantages in discussing generic employability skills, and working with local graduate employers.

Sources of data

Internal assessment, evidence of existence of key processes.

Good practice

For individual courses the HEI should actively involve local employers in developing content and regularly reviewing the curriculum.

Levels

1	2	3	4	5
No links with employers in development of locally oriented courses or overall shaping of the curriculum.		Some dialogue with employers and other bodies about the nature of courses, but limited – for example to specific vocational areas, or one-off exercises.		All departments regularly consult with employers and other partners on curriculum where relevant. Specialist subjects are kept up to date and relevant to the labour market. More generic skills are developed in all courses as required.

Benchmark 2.6

Course provision for employers and employees

Type

Performance.

Rationale

To contribute to the development of people employed in the region, HEIs should identify the skills needs of local employers and employees, and provide short courses and continuing professional development or vocational education (CPD/CVE) to meet those needs.

The proportion of income from this source is not likely to be related simply to the size of the HEI. It is affected by other factors such as disciplinary structure, prioritisation of short courses, and the proportion of income from other sources such as research. Among universities, good practice might be expected to yield income levels above £3 million per annum. Small or specialist institutions, on the other hand, might set the benchmark at 5 per cent of total income.

Sources of data

Income from CPD/CVE activity.

Good practice

Local needs should be identified systematically by a central CPD/lifelong learning support unit, using LMI and employer surveys. Courses should be designed to meet needs rather than be the products of departmental interests.

Levels

1	2	3	4	5
Course provision made on an ad hoc basis within departments. No strategy for increased provision.		Considerable departmental level provision, with some centralised programme development support. Little collaboration between departments.		Mechanisms to identify course needs on a cross-disciplinary basis. Existing course provision at departmental and cross-departmental levels.

3 Business development processes

The benchmarks in this section focus on the direct impacts of HE on business performance within the region. They are weighted towards the formation of new firms, although within an overall framework of a plan for business. The emphasis is on the benefits for the region through the development of the business base.

Benchmark 3.1
Strategic plan for business support

Benchmark 3.2
Creation of spin-off firms

Benchmark 3.3
Engagement in inward investment

Benchmark 3.4
Promoting graduate entrepreneurship

Benchmark 3.5
Graduate start-ups arising from HEI programmes

Benchmark 3.6
Availability of entrepreneurship modules

Benchmark 3.7
Student placements with local employers

Benchmark 3.8
Incentives for staff to engage with business

Benchmark 3.1

Strategic plan for business support

Type

Practice.

Rationale

HEIs have typically engaged in support for business through a range of central facilities and rather fragmented departmental activity. Such activities have also been rather supply driven and oriented towards generating income for the HEI or developing research links rather than responding to regional needs. In order to ensure that there is co-ordination between these efforts and a good fit with regional needs, as expressed in regional innovation strategies, the HEI should have in place a strategic plan or framework for identifying and meeting regional support needs.

Sources of data

Existence of written plan, and evidence of its dissemination and use across the HEI. Evidence of recommendations having been implemented.

Good practice

A strategic plan or framework should incorporate the following:

- analysis of regional context and needs, and evidence of demand
- involvement of staff from all levels and a wide range of disciplines, including social sciences and humanities
- central services and activities within research centres and departments
- clear objectives and targets, with required monitoring systems
- regular review and updating procedures specified
- processes for external consultation.

Levels

1	2	3	4	5
No strategic plan in place. Ad hoc approach to business support.		Strategic plan developed but only partially implemented, or restricted to certain departments or central functions only.		Strategic plan developed as a result of an inclusive process across the whole HEI. Accepted across almost all units and recommendations implemented. Use of plan to set targets and monitor achievement.

Benchmark 3.2
Creation of spin-off firms

Type
Performance.

Rationale
HEIs can be a source of spin-off firms, and this is especially important in new science-based industries. Regions with low levels of entrepreneurship and few high-tech industries are especially keen to encourage HEI spin-offs. However, rates of formation are likely to be affected by the nature and research base of the HEI and the level of support in the surrounding region. Not every HEI will be able or willing to invest in spin-off activities, but the benchmark focuses on the region's needs rather than the HEI's.

Sources of data
Monitoring of numbers by HEI research or industrial office. The benchmark relates only to those new companies established with HEI equity stakes or with the licensed use of HEI intellectual property.

Good practice
Recent surveys of UK HEIs reveal that a small number are achieving around five spin-offs per year. A high proportion of research-intensive universities achieve around two per year. So good performance is strongly linked to research intensity (combined with prioritisation of spin-off activity).

From a regional perspective the concern is more for the raw number than for relative performance, so the median benchmark is set at a level that is currently being achieved by typical medium-sized UK research universities.

(NB graduate entrepreneurship is taken as a separate element.)

Smaller HEIs, and those with low research income, may find it extremely difficult to achieve one spin-off every few years. Although this performance may be relatively good compared with other institutions, the benefit to the region will still be low, and the cost of maintaining a support infrastructure for spin-offs will be a low priority compared with other regional objectives.

Levels

1	2	3	4	5
Less than one spin-off company with either HEI part-ownership or HEI intellectual property formed each year.		Two spin-off companies on average per year.		More than five spin-offs per year.

Benchmark 3.3

Engagement in inward investment

Type

Practice.

Rationale

Most RDA strategies incorporate an element of inward investment, and successful regions in particular aim to attract high quality knowledge-based investments and to embed them in the region. HEIs have a particular role to play through the provision of graduates and a wide range of specialised services, from technology support to translating and language courses. The benchmark examines whether HEIs take a strategic role in supporting regional inward investment strategies.

Sources of data

Assessment by HEI staff and cross-check with perceptions of regional partners.

Good practice

Successful regions develop cluster-based strategies to attract and embed high quality investments with high levels of non-manual jobs. HEIs should engage in the development of the regional strategy, suggesting possible target sectors and building on their own contact networks. (This is not restricted to manufacturing but includes services and major new cultural investments where new to the region.)

Levels

1	2	3	4	5
Listed as a regional research resource in RDA inward investment literature. No co-ordinated response to enquiries from the RDA, and no central intelligence on previous links with multi-national corporations.		Some collaboration with RDA and other agencies on inward investment, but tends to be limited to specific projects and proceeds on a tactical rather than strategic basis.		Pro-active engagement with RDA in jointly targeting inward investment sectors, identifying firms and participating in attraction process. Provision of specialist support to new inward investors and embedding existing firms in collaboration with RDA.

Benchmark 3.4
Promoting graduate entrepreneurship

Type
Practice.

Rationale
A key policy objective is to increase graduate entrepreneurship as part of a general policy focus on entrepreneurship. While only a small proportion of new graduates might be expected to establish themselves in self-employment or in new businesses, there is the expectation that this will be an increasing number over time. Also there is a much increased likelihood that graduates will move into self-employment or entrepreneurial management at some point in their career. Hence the provision of entrepreneurial training and specialist support for graduates seeking to enter self-employment will enhance the HEI's contribution to regional entrepreneurship. The benchmark assesses whether a comprehensive support infrastructure is in place.

Sources of data
Internal assessment, existence of support mechanisms, cross-check with regional partners and evaluation of the experiences of graduates.

Good practice
Dedicated degree programmes with an entrepreneurship focus, modules on entrepreneurship available to all students, specialist support unit, financial advice and access to capital investment, and dedicated incubator facilities.

Levels

1	2	3	4	5
No significant provision of support beyond basic advice through careers service. Some individuals may encourage graduates, but absence of bespoke courses or modules.		Islands of provision on specialised courses or modules developed by certain departments. Some central support may be available from externally funded programmes but likely to be short term in nature with problems of continuity. Little internal expertise in entrepreneurship support.		Comprehensive institution-wide support mechanisms. Recognised by local enterprise agencies as offering an effective entrepreneurship service.

Benchmark 3.5

Graduate start-ups arising from HEI programmes

Type

Performance.

Rationale

Benchmark assesses the level of successful outcomes from existing graduate entrepreneurship programmes.

Sources of data

Numbers of graduates making use of HEI support for entrepreneurship and establishing a company within six months of graduation or during period of support. Monitored by careers department.

Good practice

International experience of graduate entrepreneurship programmes suggests that well developed programmes that combine management advice and support with incubation space, mentoring and financial assistance can stimulate a regular stream of new firms.

The level of participation will be more related to the scale of a programme than to the size of the institution. It is suggested that a programme should comprise at least 15-20 graduates per year, to be viable. For smaller HEIs, good practice would be of the order of 30-40 graduates rather than 100.

Levels

1	2	3	4	5
Little or no provision of support. No monitoring of outcomes.		Support for graduate entrepreneurship for 20-50 students, with at least half setting up in business within six months.		Extensive support for 30-100 students per annum, with at least half setting up in business within six months.

Benchmark 3.6

Availability of entrepreneurship modules

Type

Practice.

Rationale

The HEFCE is keen to encourage self-employment skills and has set this as one objective of the Higher Education Reach-out to Business and the Community fund. It is anticipated that in the future a higher proportion of graduates are likely to be self-employed or managers of small or medium enterprises during their career, and therefore will need entrepreneurial skills.

Sources of data

Internal assessment.

Good practice

Entrepreneurship skills modules should be available to almost all students in the institution, through a combination of course-specific modules and generic business skills modules provided centrally.

Levels

1	2	3	4	5
Little or no availability of entrepreneurship modules, eg, an isolated initiative within a business school.		General availability of modules is limited to particular departments (usually management or engineering), or as a limited-scale initiative in the careers department.		Widespread availability across the institution, especially reaching out to non-vocational and non-scientific departments.

Benchmark 3.7

Student placements with local employers

Type

Performance.

Rationale

Student employability is enhanced through work experience, and hence placements provide an opportunity to link that experience to degree courses. In addition many employers who are reluctant employers of graduates may be encouraged to recruit more graduates after experience of short-term, low risk placements. The benchmark simply records the level of placements as a total proportion of students.

Sources of data

Student record for numbers on formal sandwich courses, plus departmental information on shorter and less formal placements.

Good practice

Placements are common in engineering, vocational and technical subjects, but much less so in other disciplines. Opportunities exist for providing some form of placement in any discipline, through schemes such as placing students into schools as mentors, community service placements, and consideration of a wider range of employers. In the US considerable work experience is undertaken in many universities through the university's own services.

Levels

1	2	3	4	5
Placements only available where specifically required, such as by external validation bodies eg nursing.		Placements are an option for all students on vocational courses. Most students on these courses do some form of placement.		Placements are available in almost all courses including non-vocational degrees. A majority of students undertake placements.

Benchmark 3.8

Incentives for staff to engage with business

Type

Practice.

Rationale

Given the general desirability of interaction with business, HEIs should provide incentives for staff to develop such links, and ensure that barriers are not erected through human resource and administrative systems. The benchmark focuses on the combination of incentives and barriers and seeks evidence not just that there is institutional encouragement for interaction, but that this is understood and acted upon at the individual level across the institution.

Sources of data

Internal assessment.

Good practice

The incentive and reward system for collaboration comprises several elements: promotion criteria, individual incentives within intellectual property deals (royalty payments for example), institutional attitudes to involvement and ownership of spin-off firms, financial incentives relating to consulting and research grants, and the internal presentation of 'good practice' within the institution.

Barriers can be considered in similar areas such as low esteem and lack of recognition of industrial collaboration in promotion procedures, inflexible approaches to external interests, constraints on consulting, and so on.

Levels

1	2	3	4	5
Barriers outweigh any incentives offered. General corporate culture is focused on internal activities and narrow interpretation of teaching and research. Collaboration with business and industry is seen by staff as detrimental to career progression.		Some incentives in place, but with some barriers remaining. Typically policy may be generally supportive but there is a lack of understanding across the institution. Promotions committees still take a narrow focus on research even though guidance suggests that business and industrial collaboration is valued equally.		Strong positive signals given to all staff to encourage appropriate levels of business and industrial collaboration. Incentive procedures well established and clearly understood and applied.

4 Interactive learning and social capital development processes

Recent research on regional development emphasises the importance of building a learning dynamic within a region. HEIs can promote collaboration to generate technological, commercial and social benefits. The benchmarks emphasise the importance of engagement with regional governance partners to assist in understanding regional needs and strategic options. Also social capital can be encouraged through greater networking, with the provision of staff exchanges as one means of building relationships between HE and other bodies.

Benchmark 4.1
Involvement in regional governance

Benchmark 4.2
Contribution to regional economic analysis

Benchmark 4.3
Analysis of regional futures

Benchmark 4.4
Staff exchanges

Benchmark 4.1
Involvement in regional governance

Type
Practice.

Rationale
The emergence of new regional governance structures in the form of RDAs and regional chambers builds upon previous ad hoc local governance mechanisms such as urban development corporations, European Structural Fund partnerships, and City Challenge. If HE is to play a part in shaping its local economy through providing expertise and ensuring it is a proactive rather than a passive player, then it is important for senior managers and expert staff to become active partners in such structures.

Sources of data
Internal assessment and records of staff involvement in formal bodies as HEI representatives.

Good practice
HEI staff participate in membership of RDA boards and other formal institutions. HEIs have internal mechanisms to ensure that HEI representatives are briefed on existing HEI capacities and intelligence on regional needs. HEI engagement adds value through wider support from the HEI and as a source of knowledge. Within the HEI, staff know who sits on various regional bodies and how they can support colleagues in their role with relevant knowledge.

Levels

1	2	3	4	5
No formal engagement with regional or local bodies.		HEI involvement through individual appointments, but no institutional support and no internal link between external engagement and HEI regional strategies.		HEI involvement in various regional governance institutions. Individuals involved have key roles in internal regional engagement activities and make effective use of HEI capacities to support work with regional partners.

Benchmark 4.2

Contribution to regional economic analysis

Type

Practice.

Rationale

Effective regional economic strategies require high quality, realistic and reliable regional economic analysis. HEIs are well placed to provide such knowledge and should seek to ensure that such knowledge is used by regional partners, even if this sometimes implies critical but justifiable findings. In some regions there may not be a culture of undertaking such research, or a willingness to make use of HEIs. In such cases the HEI may choose to be proactive in demonstrating the benefits and developing the capacity to make effective use of research.

Sources of data

Internal assessment supported by consultation with regional partners.

Good practice

The HEI has researchers or a research group with expertise on aspects of regional economic development, and managers ensure that regional strategic bodies are aware of that expertise and that there is a flow of existing knowledge. Researchers should seek to involve regional partners in externally funded projects, for example by the Economic and Social Research Council, where the region can benefit from such knowledge. The HEI makes sensible and effective bids for regional economic study work, consistent with its own internal capacities and strengths, and publishes a regional annual report independent of regional funders.

Levels

1	2	3	4	5
HEI has no regional economic research capacity or chooses not to engage in such activities within the region.		HEI has research capacity and engages with the region in an ad hoc manner. Engagement is project based with little wider knowledge exchange.		HEI has sophisticated economic research capacity which is effectively and appropriately applied within the region. HEI seeks to strategically draw on economic research knowledge in its regional interactions.

Benchmark 4.3

Analysis of regional futures

Type

Practice.

Rationale

Regional organisations increasingly seek to apply foresight or scenario building techniques as part of strategy development. Some companies are also seeking to use foresight techniques for market and technological planning. HEIs should be promoting and supporting such thinking within their region, and helping to identify future technologies and social developments that will affect their region.

Sources of data

Internal assessment and cross-check with regional partners.

Good practice

The HEI actively participates in any RDA foresight activities, with internal activities to provide information to regional partners. HE staff help to forge links between foresight activities at national and international levels and within the region. Foresight should be expanded beyond a technology focus to encompass socio-economic trends and issues and to involve wider community participation – including young people, community groups, and the voluntary sector.

Levels

1	2	3	4	5
No involvement in foresight or futures activities within the region.		Some engagement in regional foresight or futures activities but primarily through individuals. Not embedded within the institution as a whole.		Extensive strategic engagement in foresight and futures activities. Effective use of internal resources to underpin regional activities and ensure good fit between own institutional plans and external regional opportunities.

Benchmark 4.4
Staff exchanges

Type
Practice.

Rationale
Much knowledge can only be effectively exchanged between HE and other sectors through the exchange of staff. This activity underpins technology transfer, but also the development of knowledge and skills for the people involved. Long-term secondment is often difficult to arrange and may be subject to decreasing returns, so multiple short-term secondments may be more effective.

Sources of data
Internal assessment, information on numbers from departments.

Good practice
A variety of strategies and mechanisms may be used. Some are inward, such as visiting fellowships and professorships, use of external lecturers, industrial mentors, part-time research positions for collaborators, and formal fellowship programmes applied to industrial researchers. Others are outward, such as secondments, and temporary or part-time appointments in spin-off companies.

Research groups and departments should develop a strategy for such interactions and maintain records on flows. HEIs should ensure that the institutional plan and internal processes encourage exchanges and do not create administrative barriers. Technology transfer units can assist with the identification of partners and funding.

Levels

1	2	3	4	5
Relatively few and infrequent cases of exchange; no culture of collaboration. Institutional barriers.		Exchanges quite frequent in some departments, although usually informal. Institutional position is relatively neutral – little explicit encouragement, but no significant barriers.		Exchanges common and planned across a large number of departments. Central support and encouragement with some facilitation.

5 Redistributive processes

The benefits of enhanced business competitiveness need to be shared more widely within the region if they are to be sustainable in the long term. One aspect of this is to ensure that the disadvantaged within a community are supported, thereby minimising the damaging effects of social exclusion. HEIs can assist disadvantaged local communities through work to promote better health and community regeneration. Community work by students is also an important element in this process.

Benchmark 5.1
Contributing to healthy cities and health promotion

Benchmark 5.2
Support for community-based regeneration

Benchmark 5.3
Student community action

Benchmark 5.1

Contributing to healthy cities and health promotion

Type

Practice.

Rationale

Poor health is a major problem in economically deprived communities, depressing the quality of life and inhibiting the potential to take up work opportunities. HEIs can contribute to a holistic approach to addressing the health problems associated with poverty, understanding the causes of poor health and developing multi-disciplinary solutions to the underlying problems. This requires actions that bring together specialists from different disciplines to work with the public and voluntary sectors in fostering new approaches. The benchmark assesses the willingness of the HEI to take a central role in such local health promotion initiatives, but also to make best use of the resources available to maximise the application of different disciplinary knowledge and draw upon diverse resources within the institution.

Sources of data

Internal assessment.

Good practice

Many universities and colleges are involving themselves in 'healthy city' initiatives and collaborating with regional health promotion partnerships. Typically this may involve individual staff or departments providing their own expertise, but good practice requires a strong institutional commitment with an internal assessment of the contributions that could be made from across the HEI, and the appointment of a dedicated co-ordinator to encourage collaboration. The HEI may also be able to provide resources and services other than research, such as through student volunteers or facilities for safe play or fitness campaigns. The proactive HEI will be able to enhance the level of co-operation within the local partnership as a whole, by drawing together its own stakeholders into new forms of collaboration.

Levels

1	2	3	4	5
Little or no involvement other than through isolated individuals acting from a mixture of altruism and desire to access resources.		Some institutional commitment but tends to be restricted to key departments and focused around core research roles.		Strong institutional commitment with wide-ranging involvement from across the HEI, including students. HEI is a key stakeholder in the initiative and seeks to enrol other agencies and facilitate collaboration across traditional boundaries.

Benchmark 5.2
Support for community-based regeneration

Type
Practice.

Rationale
Considerable support is required to address the problems of disadvantaged communities in many of Britain's cities and rural areas. Much of this is provided through government programmes that require partnerships to deliver assistance. HEIs can provide support in a number of ways, through expertise based on research into the nature of community problems and regeneration policies, through direct services, through educational programmes, and as neighbours and landlords in many inner city areas. The benchmark examines whether the HEI seeks to provide integrated support for needy communities, and uses resources in a way that meets needs and maximises partnerships while also supporting the HEI's mission.

Sources of data
Internal assessment.

Good practice
Good practice goes beyond support for individual departments wishing to engage in community regeneration, and prioritises specific target communities for integrated support from the institution as a whole. Support may be provided within a compact involving a wide variety of departments and schemes. In the case of neighbouring communities this may extend to using the HEI estates strategy as a pump primer for physical regeneration. Senior staff within the HEI may seek to take leadership roles in regeneration partnerships or companies, and ensure that expertise from the HEI is made available to the community and other local partners.

Levels

1	2	3	4	5
No engagement with community regeneration schemes, apart from individual efforts.		Some representation of the HEI on local partnerships at senior management level, but with limited implementation capability. Main focus is on research role and possible property development role.		Active and creative engagement with community programmes, with the HEI taking a leadership position and applying a wide variety of resources. Community regeneration seen as a mainstream activity with role for access policy, link to student community action, and staff involvement as part of staff development.

Benchmark 5.3
Student community action

Type
Practice.

Rationale
In most HEIs there is an active programme of community action undertaken and led by the student union. This includes direct action by students in providing free labour for local community support programmes, as well as organising activities such as decorating schemes, kids clubs and fund raising. The scale of human resources that can be mobilised through the student body is considerable, and the benefits to the assisted communities are supplemented by the value of such work in developing graduates with enhanced awareness of citizenship.

Sources of data
Internal assessment, supported by local community partners.

Good practice
Student-led community action should be well supported and encouraged across the institution.

The HEI should have a strategy for involving student volunteers in local partnerships, and a central unit for community groups to approach to identify student projects and opportunities for student community service. Community service should be seen as an important element of the educational experience in all faculties, and credit-bearing schemes should operate at both department and institution levels.

Levels

1	2	3	4	5
Small-scale student community action programme operates with little support or involvement of the HEI itself. No other community programmes offered.		Well-developed student community action programme, supplemented by ad hoc credit-bearing community service modules. No direct link to wider HEI partnerships.		Extensive student community action underpinned by institutional strategy to encourage community service with large-scale credit-bearing service modules. Central unit to identify and encourage community service activities, and links into mainstream community partnership work.

6 Cultural development

Culture is of growing significance in regional development: as an economic activity, as a factor underpinning the attractiveness of an area, and as a dimension of community identity and promoting social benefits. HEIs are key assets for regional cultural strategies through their resources, their training roles and their potential as centres of innovation and cosmopolitanism.

Benchmark 6.1
Cultural strategy

Benchmark 6.2
Provision of cultural facilities

Benchmark 6.3
Impact on local tourism

Benchmark 6.4
Levels of participation by the community

Benchmark 6.5
Fostering regional cultural identities

Benchmark 6.6
HEI spin-offs to the cultural sector

Benchmark 6.1
Cultural strategy

Type
Practice.

Rationale
HEIs provide cultural facilities for a variety of reasons, often in a fragmented and unco-ordinated way. Some facilities are linked to the teaching mission, others are part of student life, to raise revenue, or for altruistic reasons. To ensure maximum community benefit and co-ordination with other regional partners, the institution should have a cultural strategy in which it examines what it provides and how this fits with other regional provision.

Sources of data
Existence of formal strategy and evidence of implementation of recommendations. Internal assessment of performance and cross-check with regional arts and cultural bodies.

Good practice
A strategic plan or framework should incorporate the following:

- performing arts – theatre, music
- museums, galleries, library resources, historic buildings and interiors, artworks
- collaboration with regional arts and cultural institutions
- cultural and creative industries' training strategies.

Levels

1	2	3	4	5
No strategy for cultural activities. Fragmented provision and engagement.		Partial strategy covering some activities only, or else strategy developed but no evidence of implementation.		Existence of formal strategy and evidence of implementation of recommendations.

Benchmark 6.2
Provision of cultural facilities

Type
Practice.

Rationale
HEIs are often important providers of cultural facilities as a consequence of their teaching mission or in order to attract students. In areas where cultural provision has been historically low, HEIs might decide that it is of mutual benefit to them and the community to offer facilities to the community. Benchmark 6.1 focuses on the existence of a strategy for cultural provision, but this will also need implementation through specific investments.

Sources of data
Internal assessment based on existence of facilities.

Good practice
Cultural facilities can include the following: performing arts venues for theatre or music, museums, galleries, library resources, historic buildings and interiors, or artworks

In addition, a number of cultural facilities aimed at student and youth culture may be provided by either the university or the student union. These could include rock music venues, clubs and internet cafés.

Good practice here is to provide a plethora of different facilities regardless of whether there is a strategic approach. Achieving high levels of provision will tend to be easiest in older institutions that have been well-resourced or have benefited from endowments, but is also related to perceptions of need and the existing regional cultural infrastructure. Institutions in well-endowed metropolitan locations may choose to place lower emphasis on this benchmark.

Levels

1	2	3	4	5
No cultural facilities beyond those directly necessary for core courses, and little public access provided.		HEI provides a moderate range of facilities, usually including a theatre, gallery and music venue. Community access is provided, but facilities simply supplement other local provision rather than providing an important additional resource.		HEI offers a wide range of facilities for high and popular culture, and is a central element in local cultural provision. HEI seeks to expand and attract new facilities and touring attractions on behalf of the local community, developing museum exhibitions aimed at school groups for example.

Benchmark 6.3
Impact on local tourism

Type
Performance.

Rationale
The provision of cultural facilities by HEIs might be expected to affect tourism in the immediate locality. The scale of impact will depend on the historic endowment of the institution (historic buildings or world class art galleries for example), and creativity in promoting facilities and developing new attractions. Impact may be as a result of national and international visitors or day visitors from other regions.

Sources of data
Monitoring of use of facilities by visitors and their place of origin. Collaboration with local arts and tourism bodies in assessing benefits.

Good practice
Most examples of high impact on tourism are in ancient universities with extensive historical buildings (such as Oxford, Cambridge or Durham), or where the HEI maintains museums or visitor attractions of national status. However, institutions can achieve good performance on this benchmark through their involvement in new attractions of national or regional significance. For example, the University of Sunderland has taken responsibility for managing the National Glass Centre, which is on its campus, and other HEIs are participating in Millennium projects.

Good impacts will be proportionate to the type of attraction, but if a new museum attracted 50 per cent of its visitors from outside the locality, and a high proportion of these would not have come otherwise, then that would be a positive outcome.

Levels

1	2	3	4	5
Little impact on tourism. No significant attractions and no monitoring of visitors.		HEI buildings, campus or facilities attract a modest number of visitors, although primarily as a subsidiary destination. Local visitor numbers are not significantly increased by the HEI, but the attraction of the locality for visitors is reinforced.		HEI is a significant attractor of new tourists to the locality, most of which would not have come without the HEI's presence. In exceptional cases the HEI is the primary driver of tourism in the area.

Benchmark 6.4

Levels of participation by the community

Type

Performance.

Rationale

The HEI may provide extensive cultural facilities and activities, but the level of impact will depend on the participation and take-up within the community. Overall participation may be seen by the numbers of people attending performances or visiting exhibitions, although surveys would be needed to monitor what proportion are from the local community, and from specific groups within that community. A strongly proactive approach would also include involving community groups in performance and creation of art, and again numbers of individuals taking part should be monitored.

Sources of data

Monitoring of levels of community participation in HEI cultural activities, and audience surveys.

Good practice

A successful cultural development strategy will reach out to various groups within the local community and will achieve high levels of participation – as artists, audience or visitors.

Levels

1	2	3	4	5
HEI cultural provision is entirely internally oriented and there is little or no community participation or engagement.		At least half of those attending cultural activities are from the local community. Some activities are targeted at special groups, notably schools. Some activities seek to involve community groups in performance or art. Monitoring of participation is ad hoc.		The majority of users of cultural facilities and activities are from the local community, and there is a diverse social mix of users. Extensive activities are provided which involve the community. Monitoring of use is regularly undertaken and taken into account in shaping policies.

Benchmark 6.5
Fostering regional cultural identities

Type
Practice.

Rationale
Regional communities are strengthened by the existence of distinctive regional cultural identities, which can both underpin social capital and be an asset as part of a tourist 'brand' or even in attracting investment. Cultural identities may consist of languages or dialects, specific shared histories, artistic or craft traditions, political or religious traditions, or even food and drink. HEIs as centres for the preservation and communication of learning may be expected to preserve such traditions as part of this mission.

Sources of data
Internal assessment.

Good practice
Good practice internationally includes examples of universities preserving regional cultures when under threat of extinction, such as the Catalan language and culture under the Franco dictatorship, and then acting as a powerful source for the revival of that culture after the threat ended. In a UK context, good practice is likely to include the establishment of local studies and local history units, courses and archives for local folk music or dialects, and related museums or library collections.

Levels

1	2	3	4	5
No attention paid to local history or culture. HEI adopts a national focus.		Some local cultural preservation in the form of specialist collections and perhaps local studies courses through adult education programmes.		HEI acts as a powerful regional resource holding important collections of local cultural material, undertaking related research across several disciplines, and with an active outreach mission.

Benchmark 6.6

HEI spin-offs to the cultural sector

Type

Performance.

Rationale

Spin-off companies are often seen primarily in terms of technology-based activities, but there is considerable potential for HEI staff and graduates to be self-employed or to create businesses in the cultural industries. These might include self-employed artists of all kinds, musicians and related activities, and theatre companies. In many cases the spin-off activity may not be sufficient to sustain employment, but may be combined with continued employment within the HEI. The region may thus benefit from additional cultural activity due to the presence of the HEI staff even though that activity is not initiated or funded by the HEI itself. There is also a tendency for some student union officers to move into commercial entertainment management.

Sources of data

Survey of staff, and discussions with departments most likely to produce cultural entrepreneurs, and with the student union.

Good practice

This activity may be underpinned by the wider support for entrepreneurship that should be offered to creative arts students and staff. However, in benchmarking the scale of such activity in terms of numbers of 'firms' and people involved there is little hard information. It may be expected that a number of graduates from creative arts courses each year will move into self-employment within the locality, but the appropriate benchmark figures would need further investigation.

Levels

1	2	3	4	5
Very little support or encouragement, and cases of cultural spin-off are virtually unheard of.		Ad hoc encouragement of cultural spin-offs with a number of cases of staff and students known. Some experience of flexibility in contracts to permit combination of HEI and spin-off activity.		HEI recognises importance of cultural spin-offs for the cultural life of the region and develops specific programmes to encourage staff and students to develop such activities. Numbers of individuals involved are well above average levels compared with benchmarked institutions.

7 Promoting sustainability

The final group of benchmarks is concerned with sustainability – a process that is key to the long-term success of regions. HEIs as large organisations have an obligation to act in a sustainable manner, but they can go beyond this to encourage greater awareness on the part of others, especially through the curriculum. The students, as the largest group of individuals associated with an HEI, should be the main focus of strategies because their actions will have a considerable impact on the local community.

Benchmark 7.1
Sustainability at the heart of HEI governance

Benchmark 7.2
Promoting sustainability through the curriculum

Benchmark 7.3
Performance against environmental management systems

Benchmark 7.1

Sustainability at the heart of HEI governance

Type

Practice.

Rationale

In 1993 the Government published the Toyne report ('Environmental responsibility: an agenda for further and higher education', HMSO), followed by a review of progress in 1996. It noted that the only HEIs that had made any headway in introducing sustainability into their practices, their teaching and their stewardship, were those that had commitment at a senior level. However, even they failed to make long-term progress if there were no systems to ensure that this commitment outlived the departure of key individuals. To maximise the benefit to the region, such systems have to join up to provide a good fit with local and community sustainable development activities, as well as spreading HEI best practice among local partners.

Sources of data

A commitment to the principles of sustainability in the HEI corporate plan, with evidence of implementation of changes.

Good practice

An HEI with sustainable development central to its purposes will:

- have a firm commitment to sustainability in the corporate plan
- have a sustainable development group with members from across services, academic and external relations departments
- communicate its activities to stakeholders, including employees, students, local residents, suppliers and local authorities
- have a performance monitoring system which goes beyond service departments (eg, transport, procurement)
- have modules which all students can take which develop civic, social and professional/ vocational aspects of sustainable development
- encourage all its clubs, societies and unions to adopt an active approach to sustainable development.

Levels

1	2	3	4	5
No formal commitment to sustainable development (SD); rewards system discourages employees from local engagement.		Formal group meets regularly to review performance against limited quantitative targets set in corporate plan. Suppliers audited, local recycling schemes, frequent campaigns.		Senior managers work to SD targets scrutinised by working group; all departments offer SD modules; support for local and regional SD bodies; work placements meet SD criteria; campaigns no longer necessary.

Benchmark 7.2

Promoting sustainability through the curriculum

Type

Practice.

Rationale

An HEI may seek to promote sustainability through specific modules and courses on sustainable development, and extend such provision through a wide variety of disciplines or degree programmes.

Sources of data

Student module and course data, with module and course outlines; evidence of academic and service staff on courses following their own principles, for example through publications and communications materials.

Good practice

An HEI providing sustainability education to its students will:

- ensure students have opportunities to receive some academic and practical sustainability education
- link sustainability education to research activities within departments/faculties
- institute continuous improvement in existing modules to identify where there is potential to introduce sustainability
- allow students to take responsibility in practical course components to develop ideas of sustainability, for example placements and marketing courses
- work with professional and vocational bodies to ensure that students are aware of the sustainability requirements of their future employers
- ensure departments' own practices do not provide conflicting signals to students in areas such as transport, waste management and procurement.

Levels

1	2	3	4	5
Sustainability education is limited, ad hoc, and fenced off in specific courses, often fee-earning, detached from research; students receive contradictory messages from staff.		All students have opportunity to take particular module in sustainability; staff set good example in their own practices; corporate plan commits HEI to curriculum continuous improvement.		Sustainability becomes a core skill; students' work contributes to HEI's own sustainability strategy and outreach work.

Benchmark 7.3

Performance against environmental management systems

Type

Performance.

Rationale

An important element of a sustainability strategy in HEIs is the outcome as measured by performance indicators. However, traditional environmental management systems (EMSs) such as ISO 14000 are not entirely suitable for the higher education sector, because of the diffuse nature of decision-making and the inappropriateness of a uniform approach to research management and teaching. Thus best practice goes beyond a successful implementation of a particular EMS tool to include the contribution which academic and research activities make to sustainable development.

Sources of data

The existence of an EMS and parallel academic and research reporting system; audit trails for independent scrutiny of the report; continual improvement systems for weaknesses identified by the performance management system.

Good practice

An HEI with an effective EMS policy will:

- identify and implement an EMS system covering the services used and delivered by the HEI, continuous staff development, and feeding back results to senior management
- have a communications strategy for its EMS report to ensure local participation and scrutiny of aims, performance and conclusions
- build on the formal EMS to ensure teaching and research activities complement service department activities
- offer accountable annual reporting on suggested improvements from previous performance reviews.

Levels

1	2	3	4	5
No system in place for the measurement of the HEI's environmental performance.		A formal EMS in place with targets and procedures set for service departments, an estate management policy, and an annual monitoring report of institution performance. Accreditation of new buildings and waste management to existing best practice standards.		EMS runs itself with little effort; activities and projects have sustainability appraisal and joined-up thinking in research, service and teaching activities, eg using architecture experts to ensure new buildings meet SD criteria.

Score sheet

	Practice benchmarks				Performance benchmarks				Average
Theme 1	1.1	1.2	1.3						
Theme 2	2.3	2.4	2.5		2.1	2.2	2.6		
Theme 3	3.1	3.3	3.4	3.8	3.2	3.5	3.6	3.7	
Theme 4	4.1	4.2	4.3	4.4					
Theme 5	5.1	5.2	5.3						
Theme 6	6.1	6.5			6.2	6.3	6.4	6.6	
Theme 7	7.1	7.2			7.3				

Average of practice benchmarks ☐ Average of performance benchmarks ☐ Overall average ☐

List of abbreviations

CPD	Continuing professional development
CURDS	Centre for Urban and Regional Development Studies, University of Newcastle upon Tyne
CVE	Continuing vocational education
EMS	Environmental management system
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HE	Higher education
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEI	Higher education institution
LMI	Labour market intelligence
RDA	Regional Development Agency
SD	Sustainable development
UUK	Universities UK

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